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## Training is lagging for home day care workers

A third of local providers haven't taken required classes; deadline is Sept. 17

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With less than a month to go, thousands of home day care providers across Michigan have yet to meet state-ordered training requirements.

Only about 65 percent of providers in Metro Detroit -- and a nearly equal proportion throughout the state -- have completed training in nutrition and emergency first aid. That leaves more than 7,500 providers who watch children whose parents get government help still needing to take the classes by the Sept. 17 deadline.

"I think the trouble will be meeting the deadline," said Pam Stewart, home day care operator and representative of Child Care Providers Working Together Michigan, the union for home child care providers. "They (shouldn't) get cut off just because they couldn't get into the classes."

But state officials warn they will.

Though the state sent mailings to providers, some say there was confusion and many have had trouble complying. As a result, many providers are expected to be bumped off the rolls next month, leaving low-income families dependent on subsidized child care to search for care elsewhere.

The new requirement follows a national trend to ensure quality in child care, even that which is provided by unlicensed relatives and neighbors. In Michigan, those watching children of low-income parents who get government aid can now be paid \$1.60 to \$2.20 an hour per child through the state's Child Development and Care Program. Before training was mandated, the only requirement to be a home day care provider was the applicant had to be 18 years old and all household members had to pass a criminal background check.

Deb Morton of Taylor receives a \$108 check every two weeks from the state for watching her 2-year-old granddaughter and felt she had ample qualifications, having raised her own children.

"I was surprised," Morton, 52, said of her reaction to the notice to sign up for classes. "And the sessions were filling up really, really fast."

### Mass training sites

Providers in counties on the western side of the state -- such as in Berrien and Allegan counties -- have complained about having to travel to a single training site, Stewart said. And in some regions, training started as late as February -- later than other regions, she added.

In response, union representatives have offered rides to classes, she said, as well as gone door-to-door to urge providers to attend classes.

"We're doing our best, trying our hardest to get this done," Stewart said.

In Detroit, facilitators have been conducting mass trainings since May, conducting the six-hour training for a thousand providers at once at larger venues like the Masonic Temple.

For newer providers, details about the new training requirement have been harder to come by, and failure to comply is having an impact. For those who became providers after March 7, training was required to begin getting paid.

Jocelyn Lenoir, 57, of Detroit said she didn't find out about the required training until July. Since May, she has watched her three grandchildren while their mother goes to work as a housekeeper at a downtown hotel.

Without a driver's license, Lenoir waited several more weeks for a session to become available in Detroit. In the meantime, she missed out on three months of state payments, at \$5.05 an hour.

"I had no idea the training was going on," she said. "I have no other income. It would have helped with the bills, utilities, rent."

State officials say providers had at least nine months -- ample time -- to get trained.

The Michigan Department of Human Services, the agency implementing the training requirement, has invested at least \$3 million in training statewide and a database to track providers that have met the requirement, according to Early Childhood Investment Corp., the Lansing-based agency administering training.

The agency and the state also have sent out several mailings to providers as well as parents before the spring, and notices were printed in English and Spanish, said Lisa Brewer Walraven, director of the state's Office of Early Education and Care.

## No deadline extension

In October, those who have not completed the training by the September deadline will see their checks stop, she said. The state has no plans to extend the deadline to keep payments flowing, but providers can restart payments by completing required training after the deadline.

To further educate providers, the state is also paying a higher hourly compensation rate through the state's Child Development and Care Program each year the provider completes an additional 10 hours of training.

"I'm definitely going to go back and sign up for more classes," said Marie Opalewski, 43, of Roseville, who watches her 3-year-old granddaughter and 7-month-old grandson several days a week.

After attending the class earlier this month, Opalewski said she'd like to take more courses, particularly in advanced nutrition and sign language.

Few argue against the merits of topics covered in the training. Even those who balked at the requirement have said at the end of class that it was worthwhile.

On a recent Friday, Morton joined a dozen other women in a classroom at the Guidance Center in Southgate and thumbed through bilingual booklets as an instructor talked about foods that are tough for toddlers to chew and how to get more vegetables on a child's plate.

She then practiced CPR techniques on adult- and baby-sized dummies.

"This was informative because you had your own dummy, and you were able to do it along with everyone," Morton said.

## Additional Facts

For classes

Great Start to Child Care Quality Training is administered throughout the state by the Early Childhood Investment Corp. in Lansing.

- To sign up for the free six-hour training session in Wayne, Oakland or Macomb counties, dial 2-1-1.
- Training in other counties and additional information can be found at [www.greatstartconnect.org](http://www.greatstartconnect.org) or by calling (877) 614-7328.

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